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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/30/2018  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [KISL](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI ON HUMAN RIGHTS, RELIGIOUS  
FREEDOM IN EGYPT

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey for reason 1.4(d).

1.(C) Summary: The Ambassador discussed a range of human rights and religious freedom issues with Boutros Boutros-Ghali, current president of Egypt's National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) and former United Nations Secretary-General, during a July 24 meeting. Boutros-Ghali, appointed by President Mubarak as head of the quasi-governmental human rights organization shortly after its establishment in late 2003, recounted the organization's limited progress in establishing a culture of human rights in Egypt, but noted that the Egyptian people have other more pressing priorities, especially the daily struggle to feed their families. Boutros-Ghali cited the rise of religious fundamentalism as an additional challenge to the NCHR's work, especially in the area of religious freedom. End summary.

2.(C) Boutros-Ghali described efforts to develop a culture of human rights in Egypt. He cited some of the organization's successes, including the release in March of the NCHR's fourth annual report on human rights in Egypt, the growth in the number of complaints the NCHR receives, outreach efforts to the NGO community, including agreements to work together on projects such as election monitoring, and the fact that "you can now find the words human rights in Egyptian newspapers every day." Boutros-Ghali said, however, that developing a culture of human rights in Egypt will be a slow process, because poverty is a much greater priority for most Egyptians. Another challenge for the NCHR is its relationship with the GoE. While the GoE established the NCHR and gives the organization the opportunity to review some legislation before its enactment, Boutros-Ghali said the GoE is not always happy with the NCHR's human rights efforts.

3.(C) According to Boutros-Ghali, the rise of religious fundamentalism is another impediment to the development of a human rights culture, and has had an especially negative impact on religious freedom issues. Boutros-Ghali said some Muslim fundamentalists claim human rights advocacy is a tool of the West to attack Islam. As an example, Boutros-Ghali said the NCHR was criticized by fundamentalists for its efforts on behalf of Egypt's Baha'i minority. Boutros-Ghali said that U.S. and European security efforts after September 11 added to the perception that the West pushes human rights principles on the Islamic world, while ignoring those principles at home. According to Boutros-Ghali, this fuels the fundamentalists' argument that Islam is under attack. Boutros-Ghali cited the GoE's fear of religious fundamentalists as an impediment to the GoE enacting legislation to protect the rights of religious minorities. He pointed to the long-stalled proposed law addressing the sometimes lengthy delays in the approval process for church construction, a chief complaint of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, as an example.

4.(C) To counter fundamentalists, Boutros-Ghali advocates

internationalizing human rights issues. As an example of the NCHR's efforts to do so, he cited cooperation with other Arab countries' human rights councils. Boutros-Ghali also said that he and the NCHR comment on other countries' human rights issues, something he believes will ultimately make it easier for Egyptians to accept criticism from abroad of Egypt's human rights record.

SCOBAY